

Globalista

The Méribel Report

Méribel is the most British of all resorts in the Alps, with over a third of visitors coming from our shores, so it's not surprising to discover that it was founded by a Brit back in 1938. Colonel Peter Lindsay decreed that all development in the town should be in strict stone-and-wood style Savoyard, and his wishes have been more or less adhered to over the years. The now sprawling resort lies at the centre of the vast Trois Vallées ski area, which boasts 600km of pistes linking Courchevel, Val Thorens, La Tania, Les Menuires and St Martin-de-Belleville, making it the most convenient base from which to explore the slopes. The resort incorporates 14 villages, stretching up a steep, narrow valley from Méribel Village at 1400m to the top of Méribel Mottaret at 1800m.

Méribel Centre at 1450m is connected to the valley by a long gondola that climbs from the spa town of Brides-les-Bains. This is the heart of the resort which houses many of the best hotels, restaurants, bars and shops and is sometimes divided into lower and upper Méribel Centre. The latter, up by the Rond Point (roundabout) is a little quieter than the former and boasts some particularly sumptuous properties. Somewhat confusingly, Méribel Village is not the main village at all, but a satellite 2km away and linked by chair-lift into the ski area. Other communities, such as Les Allues and enclaves such as Le Belvédère or Les Brame are near the Altiport and on the edge of the pistes. Méribel Mottaret is the highest satellite at 1750m, and a convenient base for anyone wanting doorstep skiing and the most reliable snow-cover.

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Best Hotels

Due to the steepness of the valley in which Méribel lies and rather irregular nature of the ski buses that link the villages, getting around isn't as easy as it could be, making it vital to decide exactly where you want to be located before booking anything. Looking for lively nightlife and shopping? Go for Méribel Centre. Quiet, rustic yet luxurious charm? Try Les Allues, Dou du Pont, Le Belvédère or Les Brames. Skiing convenience? Head to the top, Méribel Mottaret.

The four-stars are headed by [Relais & Chateaux Hotel Le Grand Coeur](#), perfectly placed on the piste just above the tourist office at Méribel les Allues. It was one of the original hotels and remains the best, with excellent food and service. [Hotel Helios](#) opened in winter 2009 and promises to give Le Grand Coeur a run for its money, boasting an idyllic location on the piste just minutes walk from Méribel Centre. It has 18 spacious duplex suites spread over three floors, each decorated with different themes, and an extensive wellness area. Pick of the four-stars in Mottaret is the chic [Hotel Le Mont Vallon](#), decorated in modern alpine style with spacious bedrooms, swimming pool and generous breakfasts.

Also Worth a Look

[Hotel Allodis](#) (it has three-stars but deserves an extra star in our opinion) is charming. Tucked away in the upper part of Méribel Centre, Le Belvédère, the traditional hotel offers ski-in/ski-out convenience, an excellent restaurant and a Clarins Spa.

HOTELS

[Relais & Chateaux Hotel](#)

[Le Grand Coeur](#)

Route du Grand Coeur
Meribel
73550
+33 4 79 08 60 03
+33 4 79 08 58 38
www.legrandcoeur.com
35 rooms

[Hotel Helios](#)

Route de la Renarde
+33 (0) 479 242 242
www.lhelios.com

[Hotel Le Mont Vallon](#)

Meribel
73550
+33 4 79 00 44 00
+33 4 79 00 46 93
www.hotel-montvallon.com
92 rooms and suites

[Hotel Allodis](#)

Route du Belvédère
+33 (0)4 79 00 56 00
www.hotelallodis.com

Best Chalets

Thanks to the dominance of Brits in Méribel, chalets are the most popular form of accommodation and there's a raft of upmarket properties vying for visitors. The tourist office's **Agence de Neige** (www.meribel-neiges.com) is a good way to check availability and prices in over 300 chalets and apartments guaranteed to meet carefully monitored levels of quality. The agency also features select, high-end properties in their 'Label Méribel' and 'Prestige Holidays' portfolios.

Purple Ski (01885 488799; www.purpleski.com) is a British-run operator specialising in high-end catered chalets in Méribel. The four chalets in their collection are tastefully decorated and come with a hot tub and/or sauna and minibus service. Confirming Purple Ski's reputation for excellent food, Dan Hughes, resident chef in **Chalet Lapin Blanc**, won The Times Chalet Chef 2010 award.

Equally passionate about food are best friends Holly Fisher and Phillipa Eyles, who set up **Fish & Pips** (0845 474 1054; www.fishandpips.com), a portfolio of six chalets, of which, the rustic ten-person **Chalet du Guide** is our favourite. Although not as luxurious as some other chalets in the resort, the quality of the food and enthusiastic, dedicated service in Fish & Pips properties offers superb value for money.

Towards the top of the range **VIP Chalets'** (0844 557 3119; www.vip-chalets.com) six properties include the fantastic Indiana Lodge which excels both because of its facilities - they include a sauna and an outdoor hot tub - and because of its position. It is in the Dou du Pont, the Mayfair of Méribel, overlooking the resort centre and only a couple of minutes' stroll from the main village square. **Chalet Les Brames**, part of **Consensio's** chalet collection (+44 203 393 0833; www.consensioholidays.co.uk) is sumptuous living at its best. Accommodation here includes a mezzanine bedroom with four beds on two levels, ideal for children. Two bunk bedrooms with bathrooms suit more children, nannies or bodyguards. The enormous open-plan sitting room has a bar, and one of the bathrooms features a galleried jacuzzi.

Les Mazots de la Chaudanne (www.chaudanne.com) are two picture-perfect chalets secreted away in the forest, accessed by snowscooter (five minutes walk). With simple, cosy interiors, three en-suite bedrooms and hot tubs with unbroken views of Mont Vallon, the Mazots make an idyllic retreat.

Best Lunch Spots

Eating on the mountain is expensive throughout the Trois Vallées, and Méribel is no exception. Reasonably priced dishes can however, be found at [Le Coeur de Cristal](#) and the sandwich bar and brasserie at Le Plan des Mains at the base of the Mont Vallon lifts in Mottaret. Le Plan has a vast sun terrace and the rustic brasserie serves traditional Savoyard dishes with a contemporary twist such as blue cheese fondue in a cob loaf. The [Adray Telebar](#) is a real Meribel institution thanks to its cosy interiors and delicious hot chocolate. [Evolution](#), next to Jack's Bar in La Chaudanne, does great brunches and lunches (if you're feeling homesick, try the sunday roast).

A little more off the beaten track and a real find at the top of the mountain is [Les Crêtes](#). Opt for the plat du jour which is always fantastic but take note, the restaurant is cash only. And for those more keen on skiing away from the crowds, [Le Plantin](#) is a classic, that can only be reached via off-piste skiing.

Best Supper Spots

Most visitors dine in their chalets, which explains the lack of decent restaurants in a resort of this size. Try the excellent restaurant in the [Allodis Hotel](#) or Le Blanchot in the [Altiport Hotel](#). Both restaurants are open for lunch as well as dinner, and have great sun terraces, but be warned: you'll struggle to do much skiing once you've done justice to Le Blanchot's dessert buffet. Other favourites include: [Chez Kiki](#) which specialises in meat barbecued over an open fire; [La Taverne](#) in Hotel Le Roc which does pizzas and Savoyard cuisine and [Le Refuge](#) which offers pizzas in a refreshingly international atmosphere. For traditional Savoyard dishes, head for [La Galette](#) or [La Fromagerie](#) (+33 4 79 08 55 48).

Le Coeur de Cristal

[at the end of the Rhodos green run, close to the Adray chairlift]
+33 4 79 22 46 09

Adray Telebar

Meribel les Allues
73550
+33 4 79 08 60 26
www.telebar-hotel.com

Evolution

La Chaudanne
+33 479 00 44 26

Les Crêtes

[close to the Tougnete ski lift]
Meribel Valley
+33 4 79 08 56 50

Le Plantin

Route de la Tania
Meribel Village
37550
+33 4 79 04 12 11
www.leplantin.com

Allodis Hotel

Le Belvedere
Meribel
73550
+33 4 79 00 56 00
www.hotelallodis.com

Altiport Hotel

B P 24
Meribel
73550
+33 4 79 00 52 32
www.altiporthotel.com

Chez Kiki

Le Morel
Meribel
73550
+33 4 79 08 66 68

La Taverne

Meribel
73550
+33 4 79 00 36 18
www.latavernemeribel.com

Le Refuge

Meribel
73550
+33 4 79 08 61 97

La Galette

Résidence Arolaz 2
Méribel Les Allues
+33 479 08 53 90

Best Night on the Town

Expect to be surrounded by British and head for Méribel Centre for the liveliest nightlife. **Le Rond Point** (aka Ronny) has live bands most evenings is packed as the lifts close, as are the intimate **Fifty50**, **Barometer** and the popular **Doron Pub**. For somewhere slightly quieter, try cosy wine bar **Le Saint Amour**, **Les Enfants Terribles**, a very chilled champagne bar or **Le Poste de Secours** for cocktails. The most popular nightclub, **Le Loft**, is above the skating rink and has live music and a sophisticated atmosphere.

In Méribel Mottaret, **Zig Zig** is the place to go when the lifts close before moving onto **Le Rastro** which gets busier later. End the night at **Le Privilege**, the best nightclub in Mottaret. If you're looking for something more low-key, opt for the **Piano Bar** in Hotel Mont Vallon.

Best Recovery Plan

Many high-end chalets have their own swimming pools and masseurs-on-call. If yours isn't one of them, head for the **Clarins Neige Spa in Hotel Allodis**, which is open to non-residents and has three treatment rooms, two Balneotherapy rooms, a rest area with herbal tea bar, steam room, sauna, swimming pool, footbaths and fitness room. If you want a massage in your chalet, private masseuse **Naomi Colvin**, (00 33 6 30 42 73 02; naomicolvin@hotmail.com) is one of the best. She specialises in holistic, sports, deep tissue and hot stone massages.

Then restore the balance by indulging in an extended tea and cakes session at **Le Blanchot** or the café in the **Hotel Le Grand Coeur**. Alternatively, blast away the cobwebs by ice-driving on the massive ice rink near the Méribel Olympic centre and or on the winter paintball field.

Best Shops

Méribel 1450 is where you'll find most of the shops and the bi-weekly street market (Tuesday and Friday) although the shopping is fairly limited. Some prefer to take the afternoon off from the slopes and drive to Courchevel to shop there instead. One shop that is worth visiting is **Sport Boutique** for ski clothing and designer brands.

There's also the original **Fat Face** shop in Les Allues, **O'Neill**, **Patagonia** and **White Stuff**, while **Diablo** sells fashion for children and teenagers. But generally the shopping is better in Courchevel, and if there's a bad day's visibility on the slopes, it's not such a bad idea to take a car over to Courchevel for the afternoon - its only about 40 mins each way.

Best Skiing

You need a whole winter to explore the Trois Vallées thoroughly, but Méribel is the most central place to start. To the east, gondolas whisk you up to 2738m at Saulire for a menu of descents towards Courchevel and La Tania. To the west, more gondolas and chairs rise to the ridge that separates Les Allues and Belleville valleys. From the top you can ski towards Les Menuires, St-Martin-de-Belleville and Val Thorens. Accomplished skiers and riders head for the more challenging terrain off the Mont de la Chambre, Mont Vallon and the Col du Fruit at the head of the valley. The sheer volume of skiers funnelling into both Les Allues and Mottaret at peak times means that queuing is inevitable, but the lift system is extremely efficient. Méribel is also a good choice for beginners, with gentle nursery slopes and plenty of easy green runs.

Best Guides and Instructors

Lots of choice here, with ten schools, of which the **ESF** (+33 4 79 08 60 31; www.esf-meribel.com) is the biggest operator with 400 instructors. Two popular British-run schools are **Magic in Motion** (+33 4 79 08 53 36; www.magicfr.com) and **New Generation** (+33 4 79 01 03 18; www.skinewgen.com), which come with the advantages that their classes have maximum group sizes, they offer five-day courses and guarantee English-speaking instructors. Be sure to book in advance during peak holiday times.

Best Childcare

The Trois Vallées pioneered the 'Magnestick' for children: a system whereby little ones are issued with vests with metal discs inserted in the back, which attach to a magnet fitted onto the seatback cushion of the chairlift. The magnet is activated when the child gets on the lift and deactivated at the top to let them off again. While the system is currently only available in the Trois Vallées ski area, plans are afoot to roll out the concept to other European resorts. Parents can rent the vests from €18 per day from most rental shops or buy them for €85.

Many of the family-friendly UK tour operators in Méribel have their own crèches, which is the best option. Alternatively, **Les Piou-Piou Kindergarten** is operated by the ESF and cares for children aged 3-5 years with a small ski area and heated chalet for indoor activities. **Les Saturnins** (+33 4 79 08 66 90) looks after children aged 18 months to three years and British-run **Parallel Lines** (+44 1702 589580) has BASI instructors and small classes.

Best Insider Tip

If you love skiing but your other half doesn't, you can still arrange a romantic lunchtime rendezvous in one of Méribel's more remote mountain restaurants thanks to the **Ski Taxi**. Inspired by disabled skiing, the non-skier gets comfortable in a sit-ski and is propelled along the slopes by an ESF instructor (www.esf-meribel.com).

Intermediate and advanced skiers should get a **Trois Vallées lift pass**, which includes skiing in Courchevel, Val Thorens, La Tania, Les Menuires and St Martin-de-Belleville as well as Méribel. If you're staying in a chalet, choose one with **chauffeur service** to and from the skiing, shopping and nightlife. The villages are extremely fragmented and you could end up walking a long way.

Val Thorens Restaurants

If you're skiing in Val Thorens it makes sense to eat there too. For special occasion suppers or a lunchtime treat, Michelin starred [L'Oxalys](#) is one of the best places in town. Head chef Jean Sulpice produces nouvelle cuisine which you can eat on the large terrace or in the dining room. For fine French food in a romantic atmosphere head to the [Le Fitz Roy](#), while [Le Chalet de la Marine](#), sister restaurant to the Val Thorens hotel but on the slopes, does excellent fish. [Le Scapin](#) does the best wood-fired pizzas in the valley.

On the other side of the mountain in St Martin de Belleville, foodies flock to La Bouitte. This restaurant is thought to be the most impressive throughout the three valleys; both the food and wine list are superb.

Best Avoided

High season - particularly New Year and February half term. It's bad anywhere in France, but a particular nightmare in Méribel where the pistes resemble the M25 in rush hour.

New Sensation

The hot news for Méribel for winter 2009/2010 is the launch of the **Clarins Neige Spa** at Hotel Allodis and the opening of the sumptuous **Helios Hotel** (see above for more information on both properties).

The resort will also be hosting the **Altitude Festival** (www.altitudefestival.com) from 20-27 March 2010: six days of comedy, DJs and live music. Comedy acts include Andrew Maxwell (Channel 4's King of Comedy) and Phil Jupitus (the longest-serving member of the 'Never Mind the Buzzcocks' team) while DJs and singers such as DJ Yoda and Newton Faulkner will be providing musical entertainment. Free events take place throughout the week in some of Méribel's best bars (La Taverne, Bar Fifty 50, Le Loft, Barometer) while tickets can be bought for larger events at the Auditorium.

[L'Oxalys](#)

Val Thorens
+33 4 79 10 49 15
www.loxalys.com

[Le Fitz Roy](#)

Val Thorens
+33 4 79 00 04 78
www.hotelfitzroy.com

[Le Chalet de la Marine](#)

Val Thorens
+33 4 79 00 01 86
www.chalet-val-thorens.com

[Le Scapin](#)

Val Thorens
+33 4 79 00 05 94